

HOTREC welcomes Commission's actions on misleading travel booking websites

Brussels – 11 April 2017 – Investigations of the European Commission and consumer protection authorities show that consumers are encountering more and more problems with online travel services. In fact, travel websites are among the services receiving the most frequent consumer complaints, **declared** the European Commission. The key findings of the current investigations include practices related to perceived scarcity of the offer, advertised but in reality unavailable promotional offers and complaints regarding the display of the prices. HOTREC welcomes the stepping-up of the European Commission and the consumer protection authorities against such unfair practices, which actively contribute to unfair and intransparent market circumstances especially for the consumers, but also for hospitality service providers. The 235 websites (66.8% of 352 in total investigated) with irregularities have to correct the identified irregularities.

The European Commission investigated 352 travel related price comparison and travel booking websites, out of which 83 hotel booking websites. Almost 1/3 of the websites were not clear about the final price and the calculation of the price. Another important finding was that in over 1/4 of the cases consumers were put under pressure by showing perceived scarcities without mentioning that the low availability only applied to the website in question. Such practices result in overhasty decisions by consumers, who may not make the best subjective choice, and also lead to avoidable increased cancellations, bringing additional disturbance to the market.

Advertised but finally unavailable promotional offers were identified on over 1/5 of the websites, causing additional frustration for consumers. Also more than 1/5 of the investigated sites did present consumer reviews in an unclear way or included elements that could question their truthfulness.

“The European hospitality industry welcomes the European Commission’s investigations, and calls on for stepping up better enforcement on other misleading practices as well, such as the non-indication of paid for results” said Markus Luthe, Chair of HOTREC’s Distribution Task Force.

“HOTREC has been drawing the attention of the European Institutions on several occasions to the unfair and misleading practices applied by travel platforms. Also in the world of travel platforms, it is advisable for consumers to check the offer directly with the supplier as well” concluded Christian de Barrin, CEO of HOTREC.

What is HOTREC?

HOTREC represents the hotel, restaurant and café industry at European level. This industry includes around 1.8 million businesses, of which 99% are small and medium sized enterprises (91% of them micro enterprises, i.e. employing fewer than 10 people). These businesses make up some 59% of industry value added. The hospitality industry provides some 10.2 million jobs in the EU alone. Together with the other tourism industries, the sector is one of the largest industries in Europe. HOTREC brings together 43 national associations representing the sector in 29 different European countries.

For further information: www.hotrec.eu

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